

February 29, 1972

Dr. Robert A. Ersek  
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Roseville Professional Center  
2233 North Hamline Avenue  
Roseville, Minnesota 55113

*Art. Insem.*

*(See Art.)*

Dear Dr. Ersek,

Thank you for your letter of February 23rd and its interesting information about your enterprise in artificial insemination. It does seem to me of the utmost importance to maintain the highest standards of confidentiality, discretion, ethics, and good taste if such an enterprise is to continue to be of positive service. Some of the press accounts that I have seen of services like yours give me some alarm in the possibility of misleading the public 1) with respect to a cheap kind of perceived "immortality" and 2) unrealistic expectations about the extent to which donor selection can indeed fulfill expectations about the genotype of offspring. We are obviously a long way from having proven sires in the sense that these are available in life-stock. Provided the more obvious abuses can be avoided - and I fear there will be great pressures from external forces on all sides - it certainly does appear to me that more good than evil might flow from the widening of parental options.

I do wonder if you have collected a bibliography on the relevant scientific information on the safety of sperm storage with respect to deleterious mutation. I am not much impressed by remarks that "millions of cattle and hundreds of healthy babies have been born" through this procedure although that type of anecdotal evidence does argue against catastrophic levels of hazard from AID. I think one should seek to place an upper bound on the possible mutation rate after storage by careful quantitative studies, for example, like the use of counts of dominant lethals in the way this technique has been applied to evaluate the mutagenic hazards of various chemical treatments. I was puzzled by the recent blast from the AHA against sperm storage but I do not know the data or the imputed abuses on which that was based.

H.J. Muller would obviously have been very gratified to see this level of realization of his dreams of "germinal choice" but, needless to say, everything depends on the detail of its implementation!

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In your longer brochure at page 11, paragraph 6, you properly take pains to insist that the identity of the donor is never revealed. I hope you really do have an effective coding and security procedure to ensure that this can be relied upon. I trust that it is only an oversight that the converse is also true namely that a donor is given no information about whether semen that has been placed in the bank is used for any particular impregnation; I would even think it highly desirable that he be given no information whatsoever, not even the statistics of the outcome.

I do not think I would be interested in any formal relationship with your enterprise - at least not in the foreseeable future - but I would be most interested in being kept informed about the development of your services.

I would be alarmed if the proprietary rights mentioned on page 12 to new protective agents meant that your agents were in a category of trade secrets. It would be very difficult for others in the scientific community to make their own evaluation of the safety and reliability of the medium if its composition could not be disclosed.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr